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COMMITTEE ON NATIONAL SECURITY

U.S. House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515-6035

ONE HUNDRED FIFTH CONGRESS

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April 22, 1998

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The Honorable Newt Gingrich, Speaker of the House
The Honorable Richard A. Gephardt, House Minority Leader
The Honorable Trent Lott, Senate Majority Leader
The Honorable Tom Daschle, Senate Minority Leader

Dear Sirs:

The fiscal year 1999 defense budget request represents the fourteenth consecutive year of real decline in defense spending that has occurred under Administrations and Congressional majorities of both parties.

The fall of the Berlin Wall brought with it an opportunity to reduce the nation's Cold War defense structure. We believe, however, that the threats and challenges America confronts today and the resulting pressures they have placed on a still shrinking U.S. military have been underestimated. At what we believe to be a critical point in history, the mismatch between the nation's military strategy and the resources required to implement it is growing. Consequently, a wide range of quality of life, readiness and modernization shortfalls have developed that, if left unchecked, threaten the long-term viability of today's all-volunteer force. Compelling our men and women in uniform to "do more with less" risks a return to a hollow military and jeopardizes America's ability to effectively protect and promote its national interests around the world.

Make no mistake, the men and women who serve in uniform today comprise the finest military force in the world. They are truly America's best and brightest. It took almost a generation following the Vietnam War to build the force that quickly and decisively won the Persian Gulf War just seven years ago. Yet as the pace of military operations increases against a backdrop of declining resources, we must recognize that our all-volunteer force is under stress. We need to take better care of our men and women in uniform.

Despite several years of aggressive Pentagon reform, it is apparent that even if the most optimistic estimates of reform-generated savings materialize, they will fall far short

of adequately addressing underfunded quality of life, readiness and modernization requirements as well as the inevitable deployments in the years ahead. Having just concluded our initial oversight hearings on the fiscal year 1999 defense budget request, it is our collective judgment that, short of an unwise retrenchment and overhaul of U.S. national military strategy, fixing the nation's long-term defense program will require increased defense spending. Without additional defense resources to reverse the fourteen year pattern of spending decline, the military services will be unable to stabilize their shrinking force structures, protect quality of life and readiness and modernize rapidly aging equipment.

In the context of the first federal budget surplus in three decades and today's strong economy, we call on you, the nation's bipartisan political leadership, to reopen negotiations on the Balanced Budget Act of 1997 in order to provide for a sustained period of real growth in defense spending. We understand that other issues would be part of any such agenda. However, the inevitable result of adhering to an agreement that ensures declining defense budgets indefinitely will be the hollowing of the U.S. military. Because we believe that to "provide for the common defense" is the federal government's first, and most important, responsibility, we stand ready to work with you to ensure that America maintains a military befitting our nation's superpower status – a military that remains second to none.

Sincerely,



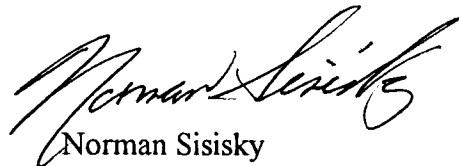
Floyd D. Spence
Chairman
Committee on National Security



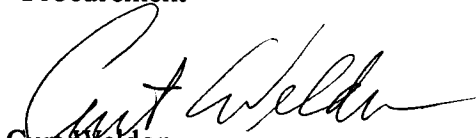
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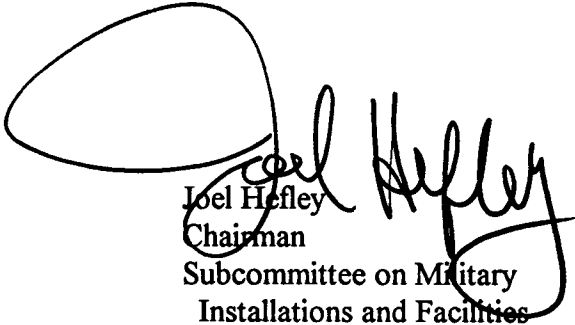
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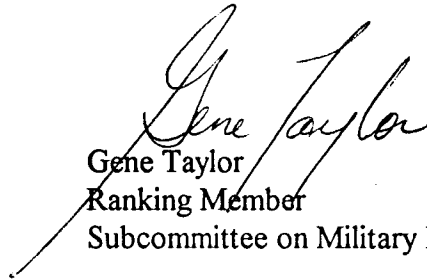
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